

【연구논문】

# **Transnationalism, Cosmopolitanism, Diaspora: How China Is Changing U.S. Cultural Theory\***

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## **I. Global Migration and Cultural Theory**

One of the most striking developments in contemporary cultural theory is the rise of three key concepts that respond to the increased pressure put on nationality as a unit of cultural analysis. This paper will attempt to show that a new awareness of China as a supra-national entity indeed serves as an important, indeed indispensable, context for the rise of these three concepts—transnationalism, cosmopolitanism, and diaspora. Chinese forms of globality are especially a major focus among U.S.-based, diasporic Chinese intellectuals who have been playing a key role in the “gradual epistemic shift that seeks to modify the claim of a homogeneously unified, univocal China” and establish the theoretical basis for speaking of “Chineseness in the plural.”<sup>1)</sup>

The following statement by Anthony King serves as a useful introduction to the broader context for the rise of these three concepts:

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1) Rey Chow, “Introduction,” *Modern Chinese Literary and Cultural Studies in the Age of Theory: Reimagining a Field* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 6, 18.

The shortcomings of any academic paradigm, be it sociology or cultural studies, conceived on the basis of a "national society," can be illustrated by two examples. With a potentially exponential growth in international migration, with many cultures existing far from their places of origin and indeed, not necessarily for any length of time (vide migrants from Kuwait, South Africa, the Soviet Union), there is no "nationally grounded" theoretical paradigm which can adequately handle the epistemological situation. It is not just that, increasingly, many people have no roots; it's also that they have no soil. Culture is increasingly deterritorialized.

In the second place, a knowledge paradigm based primarily on a nationally organized society, or at least, without a larger transnational frame, can also not cope with cultural phenomena which, while clearly related to those of that society, nonetheless circulate in, outside and around it, in the case of the UK, in the USA, India, Nigeria, South Africa, Australia, Hong Kong and elsewhere in the "English speaking" ecumene. The rapidly expanding post-colonial discourse in English, though itself posing distinctive problems in regard to its origins and location of both theoretical and political reference, is ample illustration.<sup>2)</sup>

King notes that the sheer volume of international migration has created an epistemological crisis over an object of knowledge that is no longer stable, but rather porous and mobile. The link between culture and nation has come increasingly under stress as people, the carriers of culture, literally move beyond the nation. According to Hania Zlotnik, the total migrant stock grew from 75 million persons in 1965 to 120 million in 1990, leaving "no country untouched."<sup>3)</sup> Thus, while it

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2) Anthony King, "Introduction: Spaces of Culture, Spaces of Knowledge," *Culture, Globalization and the World-System: Contemporary Conditions for the Representation of Identity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 6.

3) Hania Zlotnik, "International Migration, 1965-96: An Overview," *Population and Development Review* 24 (1998), 432, 434.

remains true that international migration takes place in a world that is still “organized into mutually exclusive and legally sovereign states that impose barriers to international mobility in general and to international migration in particular,”<sup>4)</sup> these barriers are being eroded and surmounted in ever more diverse ways. As King puts it, people and culture are becoming increasingly “deterritorialized.” King’s second point is that national culture, whatever that may involve, cannot be understood properly without also taking into consideration the “larger transnational frame” in which it operates. To illustrate his point, he points out that British culture today cannot be understood apart from its colonial history or its postcolonial counterparts (i.e. the history of the USA, India, Nigeria, South Africa, Australia, and Hong Kong, for instance).

Although King refers to postcolonialism as an “ample illustration” of a transnational cultural theory that can correct the national bias in socio-cultural theory, it is arguably the inadequacy of postcolonialism as a theory about global culture that has motivated a new generation of scholars to turn to China as a new focal point for cultural analysis. In Aihwa Ong’s view, the main problem with postcolonialism as a theory of globalization is that postcolonialism is by in large a bipolar study of the domination of the non-west by the west in the beginning epochs of global capital, and as such is in many respects simply outdated. Building on the “particular experiences of colonialism in India as the model for understanding contemporary relations of domination, subjugation, and subjectivization,” postcolonialism centers on “relations

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4) Zlotnik, 430. Zlotnik refers to Aristide R. Zolbert’s article “International Migrations in Political Perspective” in *Global Trends in Migration: Theory and Research on International Population Movements*, ed. Mary M. Kritz, Charles B. Keely, and Silvano M. Tomasi (Staten Island, NY: Center for Migration Studies, 1981), 3-27.

of domination, subjugation, and subjectivization” in powerful ways. When extended into an encompassing “metropolitan theory of third-world subalternity,” however, it “tends to collapse all non-Western countries (except Japan, of course) into the same model of analysis.”<sup>5)</sup> The significance of China-based theories of globality lies, in Ong’s view, in that they foreground the important fact that we are now living “in a world where capitalism is no longer entered in the West but distributed across a number of global arenas” where the old core-periphery economic model simply no longer holds true.<sup>6)</sup>

China is where the postcolonial paradigm fails: “China in particular cannot fit into conventional notions about postcolonial societies because it was never fully colonized, nor as a major socialist state does it engage the global economy in quite the same way as smaller developing countries.”<sup>7)</sup> Chinese transnational migration does not fit the general pattern of “diverse labor supplies flowing toward an advanced capitalist formation.”<sup>8)</sup> And the Chinese diasporic subject fails to conform to the American model of the diasporic subject who, like the postcolonial subject, tends to be seen as “oppressed,” “constitutionally opposed to capitalism and state power,” and therefore potentially a model ethical subject.<sup>9)</sup> On this latter leap of faith Ong is especially critical.

The challenge, then, is to come up with cultural theories of globalization that take into account the specific cultural forms and meanings of Chinese transnational migration that can interrogate the

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5) Aihwa Ong, *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 32.

6) *Ibid.*, 31.

7) *Ibid.*, 36.

8) *Ibid.*, 8.

9) *Ibid.*, 13.

shortcomings of existing cultural paradigms. In what follows, I shall attempt to show how contemporary theorists of the Chinese diaspora, Chinese transnationalism, and Chinese cosmopolitanism have attempted to correct crucial U.S. biases in migration studies and diaspora studies, as well as resist the growing call for a uniform China based on the Chinese nation state.

## II. The New Chinese Diasporas

Laurence Ma writes that “Historic international migration was characterized by permanent, unidirectional, and onetime movement of people from one country to another often under economic, religious, or political duress at the places of origin,”<sup>10)</sup> but that modern Chinese migration fails to conform to this model of migration in significant ways. The traditional migrants of the old Chinese diaspora were usually laborers or traders, mostly originating from five regions in China, who traveled via Hong Kong either to Southeast Asia or to the Americas.<sup>11)</sup> Most of these migrants left China due to economic distress, with the intention of returning home. Those who stayed in their new abodes tended to live in segregated communities, often “Chinatowns,” in which they replicated old

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10) Laurence J. C. Ma, “Space, Place, and Transnationalism in the Chinese Diaspora,” in *The Chinese Diaspora: Space, Place, Mobility, and Identity*, ed. Laurence J. C. Ma and Carolyn Cartier (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 1. For a synopsis of the four major schools of thought that provide causal explanations for international migration, see Ma, 3.

11) According to Ma, traditional migrants belonged to the following five groups: Cantonese from Canton, Hokkien from southern Fujian, Teochiu from Chaozhou and Shantou in Guangdong, Hainanese from Hainan Island, and Hakka from the hills of northern Guangdong and southern Fujian. See Ma, 20.

Chinese social structures. As of 1963, the global total of Chinese overseas was 12.7 million; in 1997 the global total was 32.8 million.<sup>12)</sup> In sheer volume, the post-1970s Chinese diasporas are markedly different from the old. The new Chinese migrants come from much more varied socioeconomic backgrounds, they travel for reasons other than economic duress, and their relationship to China is much more open. As Ma puts it, “The Chinese mainland is no longer the sole homeland of the Chinese abroad”; “Contemporary diasporic actors are also more footloose, less fixed in space and elusive in place attachment.”<sup>13)</sup> They are willing to move multiple times and tend to be less attached to the original Chinese overseas settlements. They are often highly successful entrepreneurs and capitalists, many of them owners of family-based, small-scale multinational firms. And their cultural identity tends to be cosmopolitan and open to change. Often carriers of dual or multiple passports, they regard citizenship as a “flexible,” strategic, and instrumental means to procure living environments, economic choices, and political arrangements that better suit them.<sup>14)</sup> Many of them can indeed be characterized as “voluntary political risk minimizers running away from a topophobia of a place of origin in the Chinese diaspora.”<sup>15)</sup>

On the other hand, there also exists the counter cultural movement of overseas Chinese seeking to renew their ties to the homeland—what Benedict Anderson in his essay “Exodus” memorably calls “long-distance nationalism.”<sup>16)</sup> After many years of being forced to efface

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12) Ibid., 19.

13) Ibid., 19.

14) “Flexible citizenship” is a term coined by Aihwa Ong in her well-known book *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality* (1999). A separate section of the paper will be devoted to this book.

15) Ma, 34.

16) Benedict Anderson, “Exodus,” *Critical Inquiry* 20 (1994), 326.

their Chineseness due to postcolonial policies, fear of communism and jealousy of successful business, many Chinese are renewing their cultural ties with their homeland.<sup>17)</sup> As China's prestige as a world power rises, this tendency is likely to become more marked. Arif Dirlik warns:

The discourse on the Chinese diaspora needs to be understood in its own specific field of associations, which includes discourses on the Pacific, Greater China, Confucianism, Asian values, etc., the appearance of which coincided temporally with the appearance of diaspora discourse. The cumulative effect of these discourses has been a 're-sinicization,' at least at the ideological level, of diverse Chinese populations, by emphasizing the common 'Chineseness' of these populations, and the global power that might be theirs if they are united around this common 'Chineseness.'<sup>18)</sup>

Anderson's point was that the seeming supra-national "ideological program of multiculturalism" has had the paradoxical effect of ethnicizing politics and of creating "transnational ethnicity" that can fuel long-distance participation in national politics that is "radically unaccountable."<sup>19)</sup> Here, Dirlik notes that diaspora discourse, too, with its overemphasis on "ethnicity and culture," can actually serve as a mystification of existing, including national, hegemonies by "privatizing" cultural identity rather than politicizing it.<sup>20)</sup> Both Anderson and Dirlik support Khachig Tölöyan's remark that "To affirm

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17) Ma, 37.

18) Arif Dirlik, "Intimate Others: [Private] Nations and Diasporas in an Age of Globalization," *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 5 (2004), 498.

19) Anderson, 325, 327.

20) Dirlik, 296.

that diasporas are the exemplary communities of the transnational moment is not to write the premature obituary of the nation-state which remains a privileged form of polity.”<sup>21)</sup> Thus, while “Diasporas are emblems of transnationalism because they embody the question of borders, which is at the heart of any adequate definition of the Others of the nation-state,”<sup>22)</sup> they exist “neither in necessary opposition to their homelands’ nationalism nor in a servile relationship to them.”<sup>23)</sup>

What is certain is that the new Chinese diasporas complicate the traditional associations of diaspora with “traditions of forced exile, communal suffering, tenacious identity, and longing for the homeland” that give the concept its “moral flavor.”<sup>24)</sup> At the same time, the new Chinese diasporas also retain a distance from the celebratory notion of diaspora as sheer diversity, “multiplicity, fluidity, wildness, hybridity.”<sup>25)</sup> Located in between these two notions of “diaspora-as-exile” and “diaspora-as-diversity,” between the ancient Jewish diaspora and the multicultural diasporas of contemporary America, the new Chinese diasporas are economically aggressive and politically ambiguous.<sup>26)</sup> For this reason, the primary difference between discussions of Chinese transnationalism and Chinese diasporas tends to depend on whether economic mobility or political identity (in terms of national politics) is selected as the most important factor for analysis.

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21) Khachig Tölöyan, “The Nation-State and Its Others: In Lieu of a Preface,” *Diaspora* 1 (1991): 5.

22) Tölöyan, “The Nation-State and Its Others,” 6.

23) Tölöyan, “Rethinking Diaspora(s): Stateless Power in the Transnational Moment,” *Diaspora* 5 (1996), 7.

24) Adam McKeown, “Conceptualizing Chinese Diasporas, 1842 to 1949,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 58 (1999), 308.

25) *Ibid.*, 308.

26) *Ibid.*, 311.



### III. Chinese Transnationalism and “Flexible Citizenship”

It is surely not surprising that the most vigorous theorizations of transnational, diasporic Chinese identity have emerged from intellectual members of the Chinese diaspora, especially those based in the U.S. academy where citizenship, cultural identity, and ethnic politics have historically remained at the center of national debate. Arguing that the American university has become a site of active intervention in diaspora discourse, Tölöyan notes that the university is “the site where national and transnational multiculturalism meet, not just as texts and curricula but in the form of bodies.” In other words, “the American university and the education ‘industry’ have been comparatively successful in bringing together ethnic, racial and potentially diasporan elites” who often engage in knowledge production centered on their own transnational identities.<sup>27)</sup> Armed with poststructuralist theories of subjectivity, influenced by the derailing of “earlier prevailing assumptions about the linear and inevitable nature of assimilation” and the “consequent persistence of ethnicity,” these diasporic scholars are a central motor for the theorization of transnationalism and diaspora.<sup>28)</sup>

Aihwa Ong, who was born into a Straits Chinese family in Penang, Malaysia, and is currently professor of anthropology at UC Berkeley, is exemplary in this regard.<sup>29)</sup> In her 1998 article “Flexible Citizenship among Chinese Cosmopolitans” and 1999 book *Flexible Citizenship*:

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27) Tölöyan, “Rethinking Diaspora(s),” 26-27.

28) Ibid., 27.

29) In *Flexible Citizenship*, Ong writes: “As a *huaqiao* (overseas Chinese), or a Straits Chinese born in Malaysia, my ideas about China were a mix of grim images of poverty and state oppression on the one hand, and a kinder, gentler Chinese people (than those in diaspora) on the other.” (42)

*The Cultural Logics of Transnationality*, Ong focused on a “diasporic Chinese modernity . . . developed among emigrant Chinese in the colonial worlds of East and Southeast Asia,” turning their economic, political and cultural practices into utterly central examples of contemporary transnationality.<sup>30)</sup> In brief, Ong characterizes the transnational practices of this group of overseas Chinese as resistant to national, state-sponsored culture, deeply strategic and pragmatic, aggressively capitalistic, disciplinary and patriarchal in familial practice, flexible in choice of political citizenship. Ong is especially interested and invested in the merchant class of overseas Chinese who, in the “city ports and colonial enclaves” of East and Southeast Asia, “facing political mistreatment and intense competition for survival evolved an instrumentality in norms concerning labor organization, family practice, links between family and the wider economy, and dealing with political authorities.”<sup>31)</sup> She writes: “Huaqiao communities have provided the signs, forms, and practices of a distinctive modernity that learns from the West but transforms capitalism into a Chinese phenomenon.”<sup>32)</sup>

It is well known that the overseas Chinese have long depended on *guanxi* networks based on “paternal bonds and interpersonal relations” to secure “networks for interregional trade.”<sup>33)</sup> Ong points out that these

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30) Ong, “Flexible Citizenship among Chinese Cosmopolitans,” *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling beyond the Nation*, ed. Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 137.

31) Ong, *Flexible Citizenship*, 114. Ong cites the anthropologist Fei Hsia-tung, a diasporic Chinese trained in London, who attacked this class of overseas Chinese known as “compradors”: “half-cast in culture, bilingual in speech, morally unstable,” inhabitants of ports “where the acquisition of wealth is the sole motive, devoid of tradition and culture.” Fei Hsia-tung, “Peasant and Gentry: An Interpretation of Chinese Social Structure and Its Changes,” *Class, Status, and Power*, ed. E. Bendix and S. M. Lipset (New York: Free Press, 1953), 646-47. Cited in Ong, 114-15.

32) *Ibid.*, 52.

33) *Ibid.*, 115.

*guanxi* networks were part of “a kind of (post)colonial habitus” responding to “the discipline of the colonial (and later, the postcolonial) states, with their special regimes of othering Chineseness.” In other words, in the course of building their overseas communities, the migrant Chinese relied on *guanxi* as “a historically evolved regime of kinship and ethnic power” in order to escape state prosecution and cultural othering.<sup>34)</sup> In order to build their businesses in nation states that discouraged overt allegiances to Chineseness, whether political or cultural, the overseas Chinese in postcolonial Asian states had to downplay their ethnic identity with regard to national politics. Within their own communities, however, they practised an often authoritarian and “utilitarian familialism” that subordinated family life to business interests and downplayed the significance of political citizenship.<sup>35)</sup> This tendency to downplay citizenship and political participation while emphasizing familial bonds in the service of business practices thus has its roots in (post)colonial state discipline. It is a tendency that is growing even more marked today as Chinese capitalism takes off with greater speed and success.

Ong notes that, whereas “Earlier Chinese immigrants to the United States were largely laborers, with a sprinkling of merchants,” the newer Chinese immigrants to the U.S. and other western countries are often “investors and professionals” who “arrive as cosmopolitans already wise in the ways of Western business and economic liberalism.”<sup>36)</sup> This class of “Chinese corporate elites,” Ong argues, is revising the dominant

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34) Ibid., 116.

35) Ong notes that the term “utilitarian familialism” is used by Hong Kong scientists “to describe the everyday norms and practices whereby Hong Kong families place family interests above all other individual and social concerns.” See Ibid., 118.

36) Ibid., 127.

image of Chinese migrants as “migrant workers, boat people,” “money handlers, trading minorities, and middle-men,”<sup>37)</sup> and proving that, more than ever before, “cultural difference racial hierarchy, and citizenship” can be actively manipulated by those who have the “material and symbolic resources” to select their sites of political and economic abode.<sup>38)</sup> For this class of capitalist migrants, citizenship is a paper affair, subject to constant revision, abundantly and essentially “flexible.” Ong thus uses the term “flexible citizenship” “to refer especially to the strategies and effects of mobile managers, technocrats, and professionals seeking to both circumvent and benefit from different nation-state regimes by selecting different sites for investments, work, and family relocation.”<sup>39)</sup>

What is especially striking about Ong’s theory is the extent to which flexible citizenship bypasses and subverts traditional west-east, core-periphery, modernity-tradition binaries in cultural theory.<sup>40)</sup> Unlike the subaltern Indian who is the symbolic figure for postcolonial cultural theory, the transnational Chinese is a figure of a mobile (post) modernity or post-postcoloniality, a figure of pragmatic adaptation rather than resistance, one who is attached neither to west nor west in incontrovertible ways, less a victim than a challenger, to use Robin Cohen’s terms.<sup>41)</sup> Adept at capitalist accumulation, faithful neither to the postcolonial nor the “home” nation state, opportunistic and inventive, and fundamentally deterritorialized, these new Chinese

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37) Ong, “Flexible Citizenship among Chinese Cosmopolitans,” 156.

38) Ong, *Flexible Citizenship*, 112.

39) *Ibid.*, 112.

40) *Ibid.*, 135-36.

41) See Robin Cohen, “Diasporas and the Nation-State: From Victims to Challengers,” *International Affairs* 72.3 (1996): 507-20.

migrants have invented “overly flexible” models of split-family, bi-coastal living, with “astronaut wives” raising children in the American suburbs while the husband shuffles between Hong Kong and the U.S., or “parachute kids” who are “dropped off in California by their Hong Kong and Taiwan parents.”<sup>42)</sup> This is a form of contemporary transnationalism that surely has its personal and political costs. Ong notes that it is neither essentially liberatory nor liberal in actual practice since it often involves “premodern forms of children, gender, and class oppression” and is linked to “strengthened authoritarian regimes in Asia.”<sup>43)</sup> It can also be self-promoting and self-deluding at the same time. For instance, Ong points to the ways in which transnational Chinese migrants tend to be “cocreators in orientalism.” Ong accuses “Diasporan-Chinese academics” in particular for using orientalist discourse to authorize “‘an Oriental alternative’ to the destructive instrumental rationality and individualism of the West” or to turn overseas Chinese on the periphery into a new center for “Chineseness.”<sup>44)</sup> What Ong is finally suggesting, then, is that Chinese diasporic communities may indeed be the exemplary “communities of our transnational moment” (to use Tölöyan’s formulation)—a moment characterized, in Ong’s formulation, above all by flexible citizenship. It is not so much, she says, that there is “anything uniquely ‘Chinese’ about flexible personal discipline, disposition, and orientation.” Rather, it is that the transnational Chinese, perhaps more than any other group, express “a habitus that is finely tuned to the turbulence of late

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42) Ong, *Flexible Citizenship*, 128.

43) *Ibid.*, 135.

44) Ong is here criticizing such works as Tu Hung-chao’s *Confucianism and Economic Development: An Oriental Alternative?* (1989) and Tu Wei-ming’s *The Living Tree: The Changing Meaning of Being Chinese Today* (1994).

capitalism.”<sup>45)</sup> Following Ong, we would have to take Chinese transnationalism as paradigmatic of our transnational moment, though what makes Chinese transnationalism particularly “Chinese” remains fundamentally open to question.

#### IV. Chinese Cosmopolitanism and the Limits of the Chinese Diaspora

As we have seen, Ong’s theory of Chinese “flexible citizenship” is already, in a sense, a critique of the notion of a stable Chinese diaspora understood as a displaced but cohesive community. It is clear that Ong is critical of the potential cultural centralism embedded in the discourse on Chinese diasporas, and mindful of oppressive strategies connected to the flexibility and mobility of Chinese transnational migrants. Yet in her emphasis on the connection between transnationalism and capitalism, Ong ultimately gives surprisingly short shrift to migrants who are poorer and to those who are more committed to political engagement.<sup>46)</sup> To put it differently, in her overemphasis on dominant forms of economic transnationalism, she neglects alternative forms of what has been theorized recently as “minor transnationalism”—i.e. not the “transnationalism of the multinational corporate sector, of finance capital, of global media, and other elite-controlled macrostructural

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45) Ong, *Flexible Citizenship*, 136.

46) In his review of Ong’s book, Adam McKeown notes that Ong “devotes almost no attention to the poorer strata of Chinese migrants.” He adds, “Surely, smuggling rings and cheap labor in the garment and food industries are inseparable from the economic success and hegemonic discourses discussed in this book.” See his review in *The Journal of Asian Studies* 59 (2000): 980-82.

processes” that tends to “celebrate the overcoming of national and other boundaries for the constitution of a liberal global market,” but rather the “‘transnationalism from below,’ which is the sum of the counter-hegemonic operations of the nonelite.”<sup>47)</sup> In this final section, I will point to two significant theorizations of the Chinese diaspora that are much more invested in active cultural and political resistance on the part of Chinese diasporans.

My first example is the work of Ien Ang who describes herself as having been “born in postcolonial Indonesia into a middle-class, *peranakan* Chinese family.” She explains this term thus: “The *peranakans* are people of Chinese descent who are born and bred in South East Asia, in contrast to the *totok* Chinese, who arrived from China much later and generally had much closer personal and cultural ties with the ancestral homeland.”<sup>48)</sup> The *peranakan* Chinese, unlike the *totok* Chinese, settled very early in Southeast Asia as traders and craftsmen, even before the arrival of the Europeans and colonialism, and tended to lose their cultural connections to mainland China. Ang notes that most *peranakans* in fact forgot the Chinese language and spoke their version of Malay. Even so, they were subjected to strict forms of political surveillance and control by European colonial policies that distinguished them from both Europeans and the indigenous natives and ironically strengthened their identification with their original “homeland.” In the case of Indonesia, which was conquered by the Dutch, the *peranakans* were forced to live in segregated communities

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47) Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih, “Thinking through the Minor, Transnationally,” *Minor Transnationalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 6.

48) Ien Ang, “On Not Speaking Chinese: Diasporic Identifications and Postmodern Ethnicity,” *On Not Speaking Chinese: Living between Asia and the West* (London: Routledge, 2001), 26.

with strict pass and zoning laws. Nonetheless, the *peranakans* responded less enthusiastically to the calls to resinification than the *totoks* and earned their resentment.<sup>49)</sup>

In her experience growing up as a *peranakan* with multiple allegiances to Indonesian, Dutch, and Chinese culture, Ang writes, “Chineseness . . . was an imposed identity” and one that she very much wanted to “get rid of.”<sup>50)</sup> It was, however, an identity that followed her from Indonesia to the Netherlands when her family emigrated there in the 1960s, and one that persisted during the two decades of her “Dutchification.”<sup>51)</sup> Now a professor of cultural studies at the University of Western Sydney in Australia, she remains committed to resisting what she calls a “postmodern ethnicity [that] can no longer be experienced as naturally based upon tradition and ancestry.”<sup>52)</sup> To speak of the Chinese diaspora, in other words, is to risk enormous generalizations that can belie “the irreducible *specificity* of diverse and heterogeneous hybridizations in dispersed temporal and spatial contexts.” In other words, “the unevenly scattered imagined community of the diaspora cannot be envisioned in any unified or homogeneous way.”<sup>53)</sup> Her important point is that Chinese diasporic identity can be imposed oppressively from the outside as well as voluntarily “self-orientalizing”—in other words, alternately complicitous with western definitions of the non-west as ineluctably ethnicized or the Chinese tendency to engage in “epic” self-obsession.<sup>54)</sup> The way out of this double-bind, in Ang’s view, is to regard

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49) I am here paraphrasing Ang’s description of the history of the *peranakans* in “On Not Speaking Chinese,” 26-27.

50) *Ibid.*, 28.

51) *Ibid.*, 29.

52) *Ibid.*, 36.

53) *Ibid.*, 36.

54) See *Ibid.*, 32-33.



“Chineseness” itself, and not merely citizenship, as a flexible and strategic identification. As Ang puts it, “if I am inescapably Chinese by descent, I am only sometimes Chinese by *consent*. When and how is a matter of politics.”<sup>55</sup>) In this reinterpretation of the meaning of being part of the Chinese diaspora, Ang insists that the phenomenon of Chinese transnationalism can and should be understood in political rather than economic terms, as a form of strategic identity politics that remains connected and committed to spatial and temporal context. This can be a way of resisting the danger, as noted by Anderson and Dirlik, of simply ethnicizing, privatizing, and paradoxically re-nationalizing transnationalism.

Another important theorization of Chinese transnationalism that is deeply political in content can be seen in the work of Pheng Cheah who is currently professor of rhetoric at UC Berkeley. Cheah’s interest lies in “contemporary transnationalism [that] furnishes the material conditions for new radical cosmopolitanisms from below that can regulate the excesses of capitalist economic globalization.” What he means by cosmopolitanism is a philosophical and political project that builds forms of “cultural and political solidarity and political agency” that are not nation-based, that mobilizes “global forms of mass-based political consciousness or popular feelings of belonging to a shared world,” and “is attuned to democratic principles and human interests without the restriction of territorial borders.”<sup>56</sup>) From this cosmopolitan perspective, Cheah notes, it is clear that the claim that “the decomposition of nation-state functions as a result of global processes

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55) Ibid., 36.

56) Pheng Cheah, *Inhuman Conditions: On Cosmopolitanism and Human Rights* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006), 18-19.

provides a basis for the generation of cosmopolitan consciousness” is “premature because the partial and uneven character of globalization hampers the formation of mass-based global solidarity.”<sup>57)</sup> In his analysis of Chinese transnationalism, Cheah, like Ang, emphasizes the fact that the “historical conflation of the overseas Chinese with mercantile capital” and “the culturalization of these merchants as self-consciously Chinese” was “a direct consequence of their subjectification through colonial ‘plural society’ policies.”<sup>58)</sup> In other words, mercantile capitalism became “Chinese” “via the machinations of the colonial state” and not because of “a preexisting Chinese ethos that engenders capitalism.”<sup>59)</sup> The risk in identifying Chineseness with a specific form of transnational capital is that it combines a colonial “fabulation” (using a term borrowed from Derrida, Cheah also calls it a “spectralization”) with a fetishistic “Orientalist stereotyping,” merely repeating the strategies of the colonial state and failing to identify that state as the most powerful agent of global capital.<sup>60)</sup> The mercantile transnational Chinese, in other words, were a class consciously identified for colonial control purposes precisely in order to curb their political resistance.

The re-sinicization of the overseas Chinese was, however, not only a colonial project but also a Chinese national project. With the passing of the 1909 Chinese Nationality Law that recognized the dual citizenship of all overseas Chinese, the Chinese nation-state stepped up the political effort to harness the resources of the overseas Chinese for national

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57) *Ibid.*, 44.

58) *Ibid.*, 128.

59) *Ibid.*, 130.

60) *Ibid.*, 130-33.

purposes. This move obviously produced and encouraged national identifications with the Chinese state. Cheah's interesting point, however, is that the strengthened identifications with China sometimes resulted in powerful forms of anti-colonial political consciousness that resisted the colonial politics of divide-and-rule and rose to revolutionary coalitions between native resistance movements and Chinese nationalist activism. Cheah's examples are the role of revolutionary Chinese cosmopolitanism in twentieth-century Filipino and Indonesian history.<sup>61)</sup> It is this alternate legacy of Chinese cosmopolitanism, which sometimes took radical political forms that engaged and interacted with anti-colonial national politics in important and fruitful ways, which is in danger of becoming lost in Cheah's view. As Cheah points out, the most recent forms of transnational re-sinicization originating in China ironically constitute "a means for China to open itself up to capitalist globalization with all its attendant contradictions," in contrast to the sinicization strategies of the early twentieth century when Chinese transnationals were called upon to help the Chinese state resist Western imperialism.<sup>62)</sup> Chinese diasporans were perhaps never far from the mind of the Chinese state, which never ceased to regard them as long-distance nationals who would not forget the advantages of staying connected to their homeland. The limits of cosmopolitanism evident in Chinese diasporas, then, is a reminder that the celebratory models of Chinese transnationalism risk a political naiveté, or even a political unconscious, that can be detrimental to the vision of any politics of resistance. Cheah's work thus serves as an important "cautionary

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61) I do not have the space to enlarge upon these examples here. Consult Cheah's analysis of the works of Filipina writer Ninotcka Rosca and Indonesian writer Promoedya Ananta Toer in *Inhuman Conditions*, 136-39.

62) Cheah, 142.

antidote to the new cosmopolitanist celebration of diasporic cultures as harbingers of progressive change.”<sup>63)</sup>

The recent turn to China evident in the largely U.S.-based discourses of transnationalism, cosmopolitanism, and diaspora ultimately ironically proves that, whatever forms globalization takes, it is never far from the problems and the realities of nationalism and the nation-state that nonetheless continue to organize and shape the lived experience of all individuals. One should not forget that, at some level, Chinese transnationalism may be an oxymoron. The reason why the theoretic contributions of the diasporic Chinese intellectuals analyzed in this paper have struck such a strong chord in academic discourse, I believe, has much to do with the continuing power and dominance of western discourse (especially originating from U.S. universities) as well as the spectacular rise of China as a global power today. It is exciting to find that China, and East Asia in general, has become the global focal point for cultural theory. What we need now are more transnational and international voices to participate in this debate which should be actively deterritorialized.

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63) Ibid., 12.

## 【Abstract】

## Transnationalism, Cosmopolitanism, Diaspora: How China Is Changing U.S. Cultural Theory

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As America becomes less “multicultural” and more “diasporic,” its connection to the lands of former migrants becomes both more significant and fraught. The Chinese diaspora in America is a strong case in point. This paper attempts to show that the recent rise of three concepts of globality—namely, transnationalism, cosmopolitanism and diaspora—is intimately tied to the effort of diasporic Chinese intellectuals to theorize a “Chineseness” that is distinct from the Chinese nation state. The paper reviews the cultural theory of Aihwa Ong, Ien Ang and Pheng Cheah, three critics whose work is arguably changing the contours of U.S. cultural theory. Aihwa Ong’s analysis of a new class of Chinese migrants offers a strong challenge to metropolitan theories of postcoloniality as well as core-periphery models of economic development. Ong characterizes the transnational practices of this group of overseas Chinese as resistant to national, state-sponsored culture, deeply strategic and pragmatic, aggressively capitalistic, disciplinary and patriarchal in familial practice, and flexible in choice of political citizenship. If Ong attends to a Chinese transnationalism that is politically and culturally ambiguous, Ang and Cheah are more interested in theorizing Chinese forms of “minor transnationalism” that are resistant to the centralizing ambitions of the Chinese diaspora and attuned to interventionist politics. Both Ang and Cheah adopt a cautionary attitude toward celebratory models of Chinese transnationalism and diaspora. What is certain is that the new Chinese diasporas of our moment complicate the traditional associations of diaspora with forced exile, while also retaining a distance from the celebratory notion of diaspora as sheer diversity and multiplicity.

**Key Words**

transnationalism, cosmopolitanism, diaspora, China, cultural theory, globalization, citizenship